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- ART. VI. — 1. *Paracelsus, a Poem*. By ROBERT BROWNING. London: Effingham Wilson. 1835. pp. 216.
 2. *Sordello, a Poem*. By ROBERT BROWNING. London: Edward Moxon. 1840. pp. 253.
 3. *Bells and Pomegranates*. By ROBERT BROWNING. London: Edward Moxon. 1841–46.

“HERE we found an old man in a cavern, so extremely aged as it was wonderful, which could neither see nor go because he was so lame and crooked. The Father, Friar Raimund, said it were good (seeing he was so aged) to make him a Christian; so we christened him.” The recollection of this pious action doubtless smoothed the pillow of the worthy Captain Francesco de Ulloa under his dying head; and we mention it here, not because of the credit it confers on the memory of that enterprising and Catholic voyager, but because it reminds us of the manner in which the world treats its poets. Each generation makes a kind of death-bed reparation toward them, and remembers them, so to speak, in its will. It wreathes its superfluous laurel commonly round the trembling temples of age, or lays it ceremoniously on the coffin of him who has passed quite beyond the sphere of its verdict. It deifies those whom it can find no better use for, as a parcel of savages agree that some fragment of wreck, too crooked to be wrought into war-clubs, will make a nice ugly god to worship.

Formerly, a man who wished to withdraw himself from the notice of the world, retired into a convent. The simpler modern method is, to publish a volume of poems. The surest way of making one's self thoroughly forgotten and neglected is to strive to leave the world better than we find it. Respectable ghosts find it necessary to cut Shelley till the ban of atheism be taken off, though his son is a baronet, — a circumstance, one would think, which ought to have some weight in the land of shadows. Even the religious Byron is forced to be a little shy of him. Mr. Gifford, the *ci-devant* shoemaker, still sends a shudder through the better classes in Elysium, by whispering that Keats was a stable-boy and the friend of Hunt. Milton, to be sure, was seen shaking hands with him on his arrival; but every body knows what *he* was. Burns sings rather questionable songs in a corner, with a

parcel of Scotchmen who smell of brimstone. Coleridge preaches, with Lamb for a congregation.

Ever the same old story. The poor poet is put off with a draft upon Posterity, but it is made payable to the order of Death, and must be indorsed by him to be negotiable. And, after all, who is this respectable fictitious paymaster? Posterity is, to the full, as great a fool as we are. His ears differ not from ours in length by so much as a hair's breadth. He, as well as we, sifts carefully in order to preserve the chaff and bran. He is as much given to paying his debts in shinplasters as we. But, even were Posterity an altogether solvent and trustworthy personage, it would be no less a piece of cowardice and dishonesty in us to shift our proper responsibilities upon his shoulders. If he pay any debts of ours, it is because he defrauds his own contemporary creditors. We have no right thus to speculate prospectively, and to indulge ourselves in a posthumous insolvency. In point of fact, Posterity is no better than a Mrs. Harris. Why, we ourselves have once enjoyed this antenatal grandeur. We were Posterity to that Sarah Gamp, the last generation. We laugh in our sleeves, as we think of it. That we should have been appealed to by so many patriots, philosophers, poets, projectors, and what not, as a convenient embodiment of the eternal justice, and yet be nothing more than the Smiths and Browns over again, with all our little *cliques*, and prejudices, and stupid admirations of ourselves!

We do not, therefore, feel especially flattered, when it is said, that America is a posterity to the living English author. Let us rather wish to deserve the name of a contemporary public unbiased by personal and local considerations. In this way, our geographical position may tend to produce among us a class of competent critics, who, by practice in looking at foreign works from a point of pure art, may in time be able to deal exact justice to native productions.

Unfortunately, before we can have good criticism, it is necessary that we should have good critics; and this summation seems only the farther off now that the business has grown into a profession and means of subsistence. Doubtless, the critic sets out with an ideal before him. His forereaching spirit shapes to itself designs of noble and gigantic proportions. Very early in life, he even conceives of reading the books he reviews. Soon, however, like other

mortals, he comes to consider that merely to get along is a current substitute for success. He finds that in this, as in other professions, the adroitness lies in making the least information go the greatest way. The system is, perhaps, to be blamed rather than we unfortunates who are the victims of it. Poor Zoilus must have his chronic illuminations. He must be statistical, brilliant, profound, withering, scorching, searching, and slashing, once a quarter, or once a month, according to the demands of that insatiable demon of the press to whom he has sold himself. The public have paid for their seats, and, when the curtain rises, he must fulfil the promise of the bills. He must dance, if it be to no better orchestra than Saint Vitus's fiddle. There is no such thing as returning the money at the door. If Zoilus encounter a book which happens to be beyond his comprehension, — are we going too far, or shall we make a clean breast, and acknowledge that this is no unheard-of contingency? — and find it impossible to say what is in it, he must get over the difficulty by telling all his readers what is *out* of it, and by assuring them, with a compassionate regret, that they will not find this or that there. Whether they ought to be there or not is entirely out of the question. The intention of a book is just the last thing to be considered. It were a kind of impiety to suspect any marks of design in it.

The critic is debarred by his position from that common sanctuary of humanity, the confession of ignorance. Were Hamlet to be published anonymously to-morrow, he must tell the public their opinion of it. He may fly for refuge to the Unities. Or he may study the ancient oracles, and ensconce himself in a windier than Delphic ambiguity. Or he may confess to having only *run over* its pages, — a happy phrase, since there is scarce any truly living book which does not bear the print of that hoof which Pindar would have Olympicized into the spurrier of dying lions. Moreover, it is considered necessary that every critical journal should have a character, — namely, for one-sidedness, though there is scarce a review that has existed for a dozen years which might not lay claim to as many sides as Goethe, if it were allowed to reckon the number of times it had shifted them. All reviews may be distinguished as Conservative or Liberal, and may be classed together as Illiberal. Ornithologically they might be described as, — *ORDO, Accipitres*; *GENUS, Strix*;

SUBGENUS, *Illiberal*; SPECIES, *Conservative* or *Liberal*; food, chiefly authors. One class is under contract to admire every author entirely without brains, — the other, to perform the same ceremony for him who has just enough to allow of a crack in them. They perform alternately the functions of Lucina and Charon. Sometimes it oddly enough chances that they undertake their duties simultaneously, and one is ushering an author into the world with prophecies of long life and prosperity, while the other is as gravely ferrying him out of it. If one stand godfather to a book, the other forthwith enters as coroner with a verdict of "found dead." Not unfrequently each unites in himself the two characters, and assists at the christening of some poor lump that never had life in it at all. In this way, every author has the inestimable privilege accorded him of sitting on two stools. If he have much of a soul in him, he kicks them both over; if not, he subsides quietly between them and disappears for ever.

The necessary consequence of this state of things is, that no book is measured by any standard of art. It is commended precisely in proportion as it has vibrated more or less widely on this or that side of the calm centre of rest into the misty region of partisanship. Or, yet worse, it is not the book, but the author, that is reviewed. This simplifies the matter still more. We borrow a man's book merely to knock him over the scone with, and in nine cases out of ten it is heavy enough to do the business effectually. It were a great blessing, could the present system be exactly reversed. The critic should write under his own name, while the book to be reviewed should be given him with that of the author carefully erased from the title-page. This lion's hide of anonymity, what does it not cover! Wrapped in that, how safely does the small eritic literally bray some helpless giant to death in his critical mortar! It would be well for all of us, if we could be more thoughtful of our responsibilities, if we would remember that for us also that inexorable *janua Ditis*, the pastry-cook's shop, stands always open, that in the midst of literary life we are in the hands of the trunk-maker.

The mistake which lies at the bottom of all this confusion has been the supposition, that there is no absolute standard of excellence to which a book may be referred. It has been taken for granted, that the critic, as well as the poet,

is born. And, indeed, though man is said to be the only animal which comes into the world entirely helpless, it would seem that an exception might be made in favor of the critic. He is often fully as competent to his task on the day of his birth, as at any other period during his life ; we might even say fitter. For, let him but make any dithyrambic pen-scratches upon a piece of paper, and the Society of Northern Antiquaries would discover therein a copy of some Runic inscription ; whereas even that enthusiastic body of scholars might fail to detect any latent meaning in the seemingly clearer productions of his maturer years. If the writing of books belong to one sphere of art, the writing of reviews belongs to another and more ingenious one. The two accomplishments make a happy antithesis. If the author endeavour to show how much he knows, the critic, on the contrary, seems striving to prove how much he can be ignorant of. The comprehension of our own ignorance is the latest and most difficult acquisition of experience. Is the critic to be blamed, that he starts in life without it ? There are some things which he understands, and some which he does not. The defect of his mind is, that he cannot distinguish with enough precision between these two classes of ideas.

We wish it to be distinctly understood, that we are speaking of criticism upon works of art alone. With mere rhymers the critic ought to have nothing to do. Time will satirize and silence them effectually enough. For it is only in regard to judgment upon works of art that inspiration is conceded to the critic. For this only, no natural aptness, no previous study, is deemed necessary. Here reigns an unmixed democracy. One man's want of taste is just as good as another's, and it is the inalienable birthright of both. To pass sentence on a President's Message, or a Secretary's Report, one needs to be up with the front of the time in his statistics and his political history. A half-hour's reading in Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* will furnish him with phrases enough to lay Wordsworth on the shelf for ever.

We have not alluded yet to the greatest stumbling-block in the way of the critic. His position is not so much that of a teacher as of a representative. He is not expected to instruct, but rather to reflect, his constituency. He may be prejudiced or ignorant himself, as it happens, but he must be the exponent of their united ignorance and prejudice. What

they expect to be furnished with is their own opinion, not his. For, in a matter of æsthetics, it is pretty generally conceded, that instinct is a greater matter than any amount of cultivation. Then, too, the larger proportion of the critic's constituents are a mob who consider their education as completed, and there is no ignorance so impenetrable or so dangerous as a half-learning satisfied with itself. For education, as we commonly practise it, amounts simply to the rooting out of God's predilections and the planting of our own in their stead. Every indigenous germ is carefully weeded away, and the soil exhausted in producing a scanty alien crop. The safe instincts of nature are displaced by conventional sciolisms.

Accordingly, whenever Phœbus summons a new ministry, the critic finds himself necessarily in opposition. The only intrinsic evidence which any thing can bring with it, that it is fresh from the great creative heart of nature, is its entire newness. Nature never made any thing old. Yet are wrinkles the only stamp of genuineness which the critic feels safe in depending upon. He is delighted if he find something like Pope or Goldsmith, and triumphantly takes to task the unfortunate poet who is unclassical enough to be simply like himself. Original minds are never wedge-shaped. They thrust themselves with a crushing bluntness against the prejudices of a dogmatic public. Only the humorist can steal a march upon the world. His weapon has the edge of Mimer's sword, and many an ancient fallacy finds the head loose upon its shoulders in attempting to shake a smiling denial of the decollation.

It has been a fortunate circumstance for German literature, that those who first gave a tone to the criticism of poetry were themselves poets. They best could interpret the laws of art who were themselves concerned in the making of them. In England, on the other hand, those who should have been simple codifiers usurped a legislative function, and poetry has hardly yet recovered from the injury done it by such men as Gifford and Jeffrey. Poetry was measured by a conventional, not an absolute, standard, — the ocean sounded with a ten-foot pole! Uniformity supplanted unity, polish was allowed to pass muster for strength, and smoothness was an adequate substitute for depth. Nothing was esteemed very good, save what was a repetition of something originally not the best. The one drop of original meaning must go through

endless homœopathic dilutions. That only was poetry which the critics could have written themselves. A genius was one whose habits shocked the prejudices of his less gifted fellow-citizens, and whose writings never did, — who was unlike every body else in his life, and exactly like every body else in his works. The annotation of some incautious commentator has dethroned the soul of Sir John Cheke from its mysterious excarnation in Milton's sonnet. But there is a sound in the name suggestive of such gentlest commonplace, that we can almost fancy its office to have been to transmigrate through many generations of these geniuses. We even think we could point out the exact locality of its present dwelling-place.

The system which erected ordinary minds into the judges and arbiters of extraordinary ones is quite too flattering to be easily overthrown. The deduction of a set of rules, and those founded wholly in externals, from the writings of the poets of any particular age, for the government of all their successors, was a scheme worthy of Chinese exactitude in sameness. Unfortunately, too, the rules, such as they are, were made up from very narrow and limited originals. A smooth fidelity to the artificial, and not truth to nature, was established as the test of true poetry. So strict was the application, that even Doctor Darwin, who, but for this, might have been as great a poet as Hayley, was found guilty of an occasional extravagance. That the criticisms on poetry which were written in the English tongue thirty or forty years ago were serious would seem incredible, could we not confute our doubts by reference to living specimens. Criticism is no more in earnest now than then. One phase of half-learning has only taken the place of another. It still busies itself about words and phrases, syllables, feet, and accents, still forgets that it is the soul only which is and keeps alive. Now, though we have been compelled to enlarge the circle of our poetical sympathies, whether we would or not, and to admit as even great poets writers who were originally received with a universal hoot of critical derision, the same narrow principle governs us still. We continue to condemn one poet by the merits of another, instead of commending him for his own, and, after vainly resisting the claims of Wordsworth and Coleridge, we endeavour to quash all new ones by a comparison with them. All that we would suggest to our brother critics is, that they should be willing to be

delighted, and that they should get rid of the idea that it is a weakness to be pleased. Let us consider if we have not esteemed it necessary to impress upon the poets a certain superiority of nature, lest they might combine to dethrone us. Have we not put ourselves somewhat in the condition of that Spanish commander who, having assured the savages that he was a child of the sun, was thenceforward constrained to express a contempt for whatever gold he saw, though that was the very thing he had come in search of?

In the matter of versification, we have been especially incautious. Here, at least, was a purely mechanical process, where the ground was firm beneath our feet. Hath not a critic ears? Hath he not fingers on which he can number as high as ten, recounting the two thumbs for an Alexandrine? Do we not see in this a complete natural outfit, demanding only the coexistence of a mathematical proficiency to the extent we have hinted? There are critics yet living — we shudder to say it, but remember that Mormonism were incredible, had we not ourselves seen it — who sincerely believe that poets construct their verses by such digital enumeration. We might account on this principle (since it would be absurd to suppose them intentional) for the occasional roughnesses in Shakspeare. Perhaps he lost a finger in one of those poaching expeditions of his, and the bitterness with which he must have felt his loss, after he had taken up his final profession, will furnish the commentators with additional proof that all his stupid justices were intended as gibes at Sir Thomas Lucy. At the same time, the bountiful foresight of Providence in regard to our own ears might lead us to suspect the presence of such useful ornaments in the poet also.

If Sir Thomas Browne had suggested remorse for having attempted to define the limits of poetry as a reason for Aristotle's drowning himself in the Euripus, there had been at least some smack of poetical justice in the suicide. There never has been a great work of art which did not in some particular transcend old rules and establish new ones of its own. Newness, boldness, self-sustained strength, these are the characteristics of such works as the world will sooner or later take to its heart. Yet have we critics deemed it possible to establish a formula, by which, given pen, ink, paper, and subject, a wholly unknown quantity (and quality) of immortality

might be obtained. We would confine genius to what we can understand of the processes by which some other and perhaps inferior mind produced its results. We would, in fact, establish the measure of our own intellects as the measure of truth and beauty. For the law of elective affinities governs in the region of soul as well as in chemistry, and we absorb and assimilate just so much of an author as we are naturally capable of, and no effort will enable us to take up a particle more. The rest of him does not exist for us, and yet may have a very definite existence notwithstanding. The critic, who tries every thing by his own peculiar idiosyncrasy, looks for and finds nothing but himself in the author he reviews ; and the consequence is, that what he considers criticisms are nothing more than unconscious confessions of his own mental deficiencies. Instead of exchanging gifts with the poet, he finds himself in a state of war with him, and so, shutting up his mind like the temple of Janus, cuts off from the god within his view before and after, and limits him to such contemplation of his own walls as the darkness will allow.

We have been speaking of criticisms upon what truly deserve the name of works of art, and we consider art not as a quality innate in the soul of genius, but as a law transcending and governing that. It is in the faculty of obedience that genius is superior. Study and effort produce the adroit artificer, not the artist. Talent is capable of perceiving particular applications of this law, but it is only genius which can comprehend it as a harmonious whole. We do not mean to say that successful artifice does not give pleasure to the mind ; but it is pleasure of an inferior kind, whose root analysis would discover no deeper than in the emotion of surprise. Construction includes the whole of talent, but is included in genius. It is commonly the last faculty of genius which becomes conscious and active. For genius apparently becomes first aware of a heavenly energy and power of production, and is for a time satisfied with the activity of simple development. We are struck with this fact in the earlier poems of Shakespeare. We find in them only a profuse life, a robust vivacity of all the senses and faculties, without definite direction. Yet very shortly afterward we hear him

“Desiring this man’s art and that man’s scope.”

Genius feels a necessity of production, — talent, a desire to pro-

duce an effect. The stimulus in the one case is from within, and in the other from without.

Are we to suppose that the genius for poetry is entirely exhausted? Or would it not rather be wiser to admit as a possibility that the poems we are criticizing may be new and great, and to bestow on them a part at least of that study which we dare not refuse to such as have received the warrant of time? The writings of those poets who are established beyond question as great are constantly inculcating upon us lessons of humility and distrust of self. New depths and intricacies of meaning are for ever unfolding themselves. We learn by degrees that we had at first comprehended, as it were, only their astral spirit. Slowly, and, as it might seem, almost reluctantly, their more ethereal and diviner soul lets itself become visible to us, consents to be our interpreter and companion. The passage which one mood of our mind found dark and shadowy, another beholds winding as between the pillars of the Beautiful Gate. We discover beauties in exact proportion as we have faith that we shall. And the old poets have this advantage, that we bring to the reading of them a religious and trustful spirit. The realm of Shakspeare, peopled with royal and heroic shades, the sublime solitudes of Milton, bid us take the shoes from off our feet. Flippancy is abashed there, and conceit startles at the sound of its own voice; for the making of true poetry is almost equally divided between the poet and the reader. To the consideration of universally acknowledged masterpieces we are willing to contribute our own share, and to give earnest study and honest endeavour. Full of meaning was that ancient belief, that the spirits of wood, and water, and rock, and mountain would grant only an enforced communion. The compulsion they awaited was that of a pure mind and a willing spirit.

The critic, then, should never compress the book he comments on within the impoverishing limits of a mood. He should endeavour rather to estimate an author by what he is than by what he is not. He should test the parts of a poem, not by his own preconceptions, but by the motive and aim of the whole. He should try whether, by any possibility, he can perceive a unity in it toward which the several parts centre. He should remember that very many excellent and enlightened men, in other respects good citizens, have esteemed poetry to be, not only an art, but the highest of all arts, round which the

rest of what we call the fine arts revolve, receiving light and warmth. He should consider that only they whose understandings are superior to and include that of the artist can criticize his work by intuition. He should feel that his duty is to follow his author, and not to guide him. Above all, he should consider that the effort which the poor author has made to please the world was very likely not intended as a personal insult to be indignantly resented, but should make an attempt to read the book he is about to pronounce judgment upon, and that, too, with a civil attention.

The difference between a true poet and a mere rhymers is not one of degree, but of kind. It is as great as that between the inventor and the mechanic. The latter can make all the several parts of the machine, and adapt them to each other with a polished nicety. The idea once given, he can always reproduce the complete engine. The product of his labor is the highest finish of which brass and steel are capable, but it remains a dead body of metal still. The inventor alone can furnish these strong, weariless limbs with a soul. In his creative intellect resides the spirit of life which shall inspire this earthborn Titan, which shall set him at work in the forge and the mill, and compel him to toil side by side in friendly concert with the forces of nature. There, in the dark, patiently delves the hundred-handed Pyrophagus, and it is this primal breath of the master's spirit which for ever gives motion and intelligence to that iron brain and those nerves of steel.

The first thing that we have to demand of a poet is, that his verses be really alive. Life we look for first, and growth as its necessary consequence and indicator. And it must be an original, not a parasitic life, — a life capable of reproduction. There will be barnacles which glue themselves fast to every intellectual movement of the world, and seem to possess in themselves that power of motion which they truly diminish in that which sustains them and bears them along. But there are also unseen winds which fill the sails, and stars by which the courses are set. The oak, which lies in the good ship's side an inert mass, still lives in the green progeny of its chance-dropped acorns. The same gale which bends the creaking mast of pine sings through the tossing hair of its thousand sons in the far inland. The tree of the mechanic bears only wooden acorns.

Is Robert Browning, then, a poet? Our knowledge of

him can date back seven years, and an immortality which has withstood the manifold changes of so long a period can be, as immortalities go, no mushroom. How many wooden gods have we seen during that period transformed into chopping-blocks, or kindled into unwilling and sputtering sacrificial fires upon the altars of other deities as ligneous as themselves ! We got our first knowledge of him from two verses of his which we saw quoted in a newspaper, and from that moment took him for granted as a new poet. Since then we have watched him with a constantly deepening interest. Much that seemed obscure and formless in his earlier productions has been interpreted by his later ones. Taken by itself, it might remain obscure and formless still, but it becomes clear and assumes definite shape when considered as only a part of a yet unfinished whole. We perceive running through and knitting together all his poems the homogeneous spirit, gradually becoming assured of itself, of an original mind. We know not what higher praise to bestow on him than to say that his latest poems are his best.

His earlier poems we shall rather choose to consider as parts and illustrations of his poetic life than as poems. We find here the consciousness of wings, the heaven grasped and measured by the aspiring eye, but no sustained flight as yet. These are the poet's justifications of himself to himself, while he was brooding over greater designs. They are the rounds of the ladder by which he has climbed, and more interesting for the direction they indicate than from any intrinsic worth. We would not be considered as undervaluing them. Had he written nothing else, we should allow them as heights attained, and not as mere indications of upward progress. We shall hope presently to show by some extracts, that they are not simply limbs, but are endowed with a genuine and vigorous individual life. But Mr. Browning can afford to do without them. And if he has not yet fully expressed himself, if we can as yet see only the lower half of the statue, we can in some measure foretell the whole. We can partly judge whether there is likely to be in it the simplicity and comprehensiveness, the poise, which indicates the true artist. At least, we will not judge it by its base, however the sculptor's fancy may have wreathed it with graceful or grotesque arabesques, to render it the worthy footstool of his crowning work. Above all, let us divest ourselves of the petty influences of

contemporaneousness, and look at it as if it were just unburied from the embalming lava of Pompeii. Is the eye of the critic so constituted, that it can see only when turned backward?

Mr. Browning's first published poem was *Paracelsus*. This was followed by *Strafford*, a Tragedy, of which we know only that it was "acted at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden." We do not need it in order to get a distinct view of his steady poetical growth. Next comes *Sordello*, a Poem; and the list is completed by *Bells and Pomegranates*, a series of lyrical and dramatic poems published at intervals during the last six years. Were we to estimate *Paracelsus* and *Sordello* separately and externally as individual poems, without taking into consideration their antecedent or consequent internal relations, we should hardly do justice to the author. Viewed by itself, *Sordello* would incline us to think that Mr. Browning had lost in simplicity, clearness, and directness of aim, in compactness and decision of form, and in unity of effect. We may as well say bluntly, that it is totally incomprehensible as a connected whole. It reminds one of Coleridge's epigram on his own *Ancient Mariner*:—

"Your poem must eternal be,
Dear Sir, it cannot fail;
For 't is incomprehensible,
And without head or tail."

It presents itself to us, at first view, as a mere nebulosity, triumphantly defying the eye to concentrate itself on any one point. But if we consider it intently, as possibly having some definite relation to the author's poetic life, we begin to perceive a luminous heart in the midst of the misty whirl, and, indeed, as a natural consequence of it. By dint of patient watchfulness through such telescope as we possess, we have even thought that it might not be wholly incapable of resolution as a system by itself. It is crowded full of images, many of them truly grand. Here and there it opens cloudily, and reveals glimpses of profound thought and conception of character. The sketch of *Taurello*, the Italian captain of the Middle Ages, drawn rapidly, as with a bit of charcoal on a rough wall, is masterly. Perhaps we should define what is in itself indefinable as well as may be, if we say that we find in *Sordello* the materials of a drama, pro-

fuse, but as yet in formless solution, not crystallized firmly round the thread of any precise plot, but capable of it. We will say that it was a fine poem before the author wrote it. In reading it, we have seemed to ourselves to be rambling along some wooded ridge in the tropics. Here gigantic vines clamber at random, hanging strange trees with clusters that seem dipped in and dripping with the sluggish sunshine. Here we break our way through a matted jungle, where, nevertheless, we stumble over giant cactuses in bloom, lolling delighted in the sultry air. Now and then a gap gives us a glimpse of some ravishing distance, with a purple mountain-peak or two, and all the while clouds float over our heads, gorgeous and lurid, which we may consider as whales or camels, just as our Polonian fancy chooses.

A book is often termed obscure and unintelligible by a kind of mental *hypallage*, which exchanges the cases of the critic and the thing criticized. But we honestly believe that Sordello is enveloped in mists, of whose begetting we are quite guiltless. It may have a meaning, but, as the logicians say, *a posse ad esse non valet argumentum*. Or the meaning may be in the same category with those flitting islands of the Canary group, which vanished as soon as seen, and of which stout Sir John Hawkins says mournfully, that "it should seem he was not yet born to whom God hath appointed the finding of them." Obscurity is a luxury in which no young author has a right to indulge himself. We allow writers of established reputations to tax our brains to a limited extent, because we expect to find something, and feel a little natural delicacy about confessing that we come back from the search without a mare's egg or so, at the very least. Then, too, there are some writers whose obscurity seems to be their chief merit. Of these, some of the Persian religious poets, and, above all, the "later Platonists," may serve as examples. These have a title by prescription to every imaginable form of obfuscation. When we hear that any one has retired into obscurity, we can fancy him plunging into the speculations of these useful men. Before we had seen the *Epistolæ Obscurorum Virorum*, we took it for granted as a collection of their correspondence, though we found it hard to conceive of any contemporary class of persons who corresponded with them in the smallest particular.

We do not by any means join in the vulgar demand, that

authors should write down to the average understanding ; because we have faith that this understanding is becoming equal to higher and higher tasks from year to year. Nor should we be thankful for that simplicity which many inculcate, and by which they mean that an author should be as artificial and as flat as he can. The simplicity of one age can never be that of the next. That which was natural to Homer would be a mechanical contrivance now. Our age is eminently introspective. It is continually asking itself (with no very satisfactory result), Whence ? and Whither ? and though seven cities quarrelled over one limb of this problem after Homer's death, it is hardly probable that he ever asked himself the question, whence he came, or whither he was going, in the whole course of his life. Our poets do not sing to an audience who can neither read nor write. The persons who pay for their verses are not a half-dozen of petty kings, who would not (as the boys say) know B from a bull's foot, and the polish of whose courts would be pretty well paralleled in that of his present Gracious Majesty of Ashantee. The law of demand and supply rules everywhere, and we doubt not that Apollo composed bucolics in words of one syllable for the edification of his serene dunceship Admetus. His sheep (a less critical audience) may have heard grander music, of which Orpheus perhaps caught echoes among the hills. We cannot have back the simplicity of the song without the simplicity of the age to which it was addressed. Our friend Jinks, who is so clamorous for it, must wear raw bull's-hide, or that still less expensive undress of Sir Richard Blackmore's Pict. The reading public cannot have its cake and eat it too, still less can it have the cake which it ate two thousand years ago. Moreover, we are not Greeks, but Goths ; and the original blood is still so vivacious in our veins, that our rustic architects, though admitting, as a matter of pure æsthetics, that all modern meeting-houses should be exact Grecian temples or tombs (steeple and all), will yet contrive to smuggle a pointed window somewhere into the back of the building, or the belfry.

Having glanced confusedly at Sordello, as far as it concerns ourselves, let us try if we can discover that it has any more distinct relation to the author. And here we ought naturally to take it in connection with Paracelsus. From this point of view, a natural perspective seems to arrange itself,

and a harmony is established between the two otherwise discordant poems. Paracelsus, then, appears to us to represent, and to be the outlet of, that early life of the poet which is satisfied with aspiration simply ; Sordello, that immediately succeeding period when power has become conscious, but exerts itself for the mere pleasure it feels in the free play of its muscles, without any settled purpose. Presently we shall see that it has defined and concentrated itself, and set about the production of solid results. There is not less power ; it is only deeper, and does not dissipate itself over so large a surface. The range is not narrower, but choicer.

There are many fine passages in Paracelsus which we would fain copy here, many *obiter dicta* which we turn from reluctantly ; but as we think the author will be seen most fairly in his Bells and Pomegranates, we shall select our extracts chiefly from them. We copy the following passage from Paracelsus, not as being the best, but because it is entire in itself.

“ Over the sea our galleys went,
Cleaving prows in order brave,
With speeding wind and a bounding wave, —

A gallant armament :

Each bark built out of a forest-tree,
Left leafy and rough as first it grew,
And nailed all over the gaping sides,
Within and without, with black-bull hides,
Seethed in fat and supplied in flame ;
So each good ship was rude to see,
Rude and bare to outward view,

But each upbore a stately tent :

Cedar pales in scented row
Kept out the flakes of dancing brine :
An awning drooped the mast below,
That neither noontide nor starshine,
Nor moonlight cold which maketh mad,

Might pierce the regal tenement.

When the sun dawned, gay and glad
We set the sail and plied the oar ;
But when the night-wind blew like breath,
For joy of one day's voyage more,
We sang together on the wide sea,
Like men at peace on a peaceful shore ;
Each sail was loosed to the wind so free,

Each helm made sure by the twilight star,
And in a sleep as calm as death,
We, the voyagers from afar,
Lay stretched, — each weary crew
In a circle round its wondrous tent,
Whence gleamed soft light and curled rich scent,
And with light and perfume, music too :
At morn we started beside the mast,
And still each ship was sailing fast !
Now one morn land appeared ! — a speck
Dim trembling betwixt sea and sky —
Not so the isles our voyage must find
Should meet our longing eye ;
But the heaving sea was black behind
Many a night and many a day,
And land, though but a rock, was nigh ;
So we broke the cedar pales away,
And let the purple flap in the wind :
And a statue bright was on every deck !
We shouted, every man of us,
And steered right into the harbour thus,
With pomp and pæan glorious.

“ An hundred shapes of lucid stone !
All day we built its shrine for each —
A shrine of rock for every one —
Nor paused till in the westering sun
We sat together on the beach
To sing, because our task was done ;
When lo ! what shouts and merry songs !
What laughter all the distance stirs !
A loaded raft, and happy throngs
Of gentle islanders !
‘ Our isles are just at hand,’ they cried ;
‘ Like cloudlets faint in even sleeping,
Our temple-gates are opened wide,
Our olive-groves thick shade are keeping
For these majestic forms,’ they cried.
Then we awoke with sudden start
From our deep dream, and knew, too late,
How bare the rock, how desolate,
Which had received our precious freight :
Yet we called out, — ‘ Depart !
Our gifts, once given, must here abide :
Our work is done ; we have no heart
To mar our work,’ we cried.” — pp. 144–147.

This beautiful lyric is sung by Paracelsus, who calls it

“The sad rhyme of the men who proudly clung
To their first fault, and withered in their pride.”

Let us now turn to the Bells and Pomegranates. And here we are met on the very threshold by the difficulty of selection. Not only are the lyrics singularly various in tone and character, but, in the dramas, that interdependence of the parts, which is one of their most striking and singular merits, makes any passage taken by itself do great injustice to the author. These dramas are not made up of a number of beauties, distinct and isolate as pearls, threaded upon the string of the plot. Each has a permeating life and spirit of its own. When we would break off any fragment, we cannot find one which would by itself approach completeness. It is like tearing away a limb from a living body. For these are works of art in the truest sense. They are not aggregations of dissonant beauties, like some modern sculptures, against which the Apollo might bring an action of trover for an arm, and the Antinoüs for a leg, but pure statues, in which every thing superfluous has been sternly chiselled away, and whose wonderful balance might seem tameness to the ordinary observer, who demands *strain* as an evidence of strength. They are not arguments on either side of any of the great questions which divide the world. The characters in them are not bundles of different characteristics, but their gradual development runs through the whole drama and makes the life of it. We do not learn what they are by what they say of themselves, or by what is said of them, so much as by what they do or leave undone. Nor does any drama seem to be written for the display of some one character which the author has conceived and makes a favorite of. No undue emphasis is laid upon any. Each fills his part, and each, in his higher or lower grade, his greater or less prominence, is equally necessary to the rest. Above all, his personages are not mere mouthpieces for the author's idiosyncrasies. We take leave of Mr. Browning at the end of *Sordello*, and, except in some shorter lyrics, see no more of him. His men and women *are* men and women, and not Mr. Browning masquerading in different-colored dominos. We implied as much when we said that he was an artist. For the artist-period begins precisely at the point where the pleasure of

expressing self ends, and the poet becomes sensible that his highest duty is to give voice to the myriad forms of nature, which, wanting him, were dumb. The term *art* includes many lower faculties of the poet ; but this appears to us its highest and most comprehensive definition. Hence Shakespeare, the truest of artists, is also nothing more than a voice. We seek in vain in his plays for any traces of his personal character or history. A man may be even a great poet without being an artist. Byron was, through all whose works we find no individual, self-subsistent characters. His heroes are always himself in so many different stage-costumes, and his *Don Juan* is his best poem, and approaches more nearly a work of art, by just so much as he has in that expressed *himself* most truly and untheatrically.

Regarding Mr. Browning's dramas in this light, and esteeming them as so excellent and peculiar, we shall not do him the injustice of picking out detached beauties, and holding them up as fair specimens of his power. For his wholeness is one great proof of this power. He may be surpassed by one contemporary in finish, by another in melody ; but we shall not try him by comparison. We are thankful to him for being what he is, for contriving to be himself and to keep so. Why, in ordinary society, is it not sometimes the solitary merit of Smith, and all that makes him endurable, that he is not exactly Brown ? We are quite willing to be grateful for whatever gifts it has pleased God to bestow on any musically-endowed spirit. The scale is composed of various notes, and cannot afford to do without any of them, or to have one substituted for another.

It is not so much for his expression of isolated thoughts as for his power of thinking, that we value Browning. Most readers prefer those authors in whom they find the faculty of observation, to those in whom power of thought is predominant, for the simple reason, that sensation is easier than reflection. By observation we mean that quality of mind which discriminates and sets forth particular ideas by and for themselves alone. Thought goes deeper, and employs itself in detecting and exemplifying the unity which embraces and underlies all ideas. A writer of the first class reaches the mass of readers because they can verify what he says by their own experience, and we cannot help thinking tolerably well of those who put us in mind of our own penetration.

He requires them only to feel. A writer of the other kind taxes the understanding, and demands in turn an exercise of thought on the part of his readers. Both of these faculties may, of course, differ in degree, may be more or less external, more or less profound, as it may happen. They co-exist in the same mind, overlapping one the other by a wider or more limited extent. The predominance of one or the other determines the tendency of the mind. Those are exceptional natures in which they balance each other as in Shakspeare. We may instance Browne and Montaigne as examples in one kind, Bacon as an illustration of the other.

It is because we find in Browning eminent qualities as a dramatist, that we assign him his place as a thinker. This dramatic faculty is a far rarer one than we are apt to imagine. It does not consist in a familiarity with stage effect, in the capacity for inventing and developing a harmonious and intricate plot, nor in an appreciation of passion as it reveals itself in outward word or action. It lies not in a knowledge of character, so much as in an imaginative conception of the springs of it. Neither each of these singly, nor all of them together, without that unitary faculty which fuses the whole and subjects them all to the motion of a single will, constitute a dramatist. Among the crowd of play-writers contemporary with Shakspeare, we can find poets enough, but can we name three who were dramatists in any other than a technical sense? In endeavouring to eliminate the pure dramatic faculty, by precipitating and removing one by one the grosser materials which it holds in solution, we have left the Greek drama entirely out of the question. The *motive* of the ancient tragedy differs from that of the modern in kind. Nor do we speak of this faculty as a higher or lower one, but simply as being distinct and rare.

If we cannot satisfy ourselves, then, by giving a variety of extracts from Mr. Browning's different dramas, since any fragment which we could pick out of the mosaic, so perfect and graceful as a whole, might be after all but a shapeless bit of colored pebble with the rough cement clinging all round its edge, let us endeavour to give our readers as complete a view of a single play as our limits will allow. And for this purpose we shall select *Luria*, the last published of his tragedies, and which, if not the best, is certainly one of the most striking in the clearness of its purpose, the energetic

rapidity of its movement, the harmony of its details, the natural attraction with which they all tend toward, and at last blend in, the consummation, and in the simplicity and concentration of its tragic element.

The plot is noble in its plainness. War exists between Florence and Pisa. Luria, a Moor, has superseded Puccio in the command of the Florentine forces. Gifted in the highest degree with the rapid intellect and fiery, explosive force of his race, and loving the turmoil of battle because it taxes these qualities of his nature to the utmost, he has brought the war to a point where one decisive blow, and that clearly within his own power to strike, will close it triumphantly for Florence. That republic, meanwhile, which is represented as making it a principle to use every great captain as a sword, to be broken as soon as her purpose should be attained, lest it be turned against herself, has her spies in the camp, who report from time to time every circumstance which may be twisted into a charge against Luria. His trial is, in fact, going on in Florence, and the sentence is ready to fall at the moment when, Pisa being subdued, he ceases to be useful, and may become dangerous. Braccio, who is placed in the camp as a spy upon Luria, is a man of pure intellect, with a compact, sinewy, perfectly trained mind, which he uses, as it were something apart from himself, for the delight which he feels in his own skill, and in making it act upon remote results. He cannot comprehend Luria, with whose intellect that element of mysticism, so common in the East, is interfused, and gives him a tendency to brood over and analyze his own sensations and enjoy ideal triumphs even more keenly than those which await mere external success. Artificial himself, and constantly on his guard against artifice in others, Braccio can still less appreciate that fierce, uncultivated nature in which sense and spirit seem molten together, in which intuition has not been stinted into calculation, and which enjoys its own suppleness and swift strength for themselves alone, and not as means. His own faculties he uses as chessmen with which the game of life is to be played. Domizia, a noble Florentine lady, whose father and two brothers have been punished by the cautious republic for the successes they had achieved, has come to the camp foreseeing the fate in store for Luria, intending to warn him of it, and to bring about her own revenge against Florence

by means of his indignation at the discovered treachery. The other characters of the drama are Tiburzio, the Pisan general, Jacopo Lapo, secretary to Braccio, and Husain, a Moor, the friend of Luria.

We quote first a passage from the first scene, between Braccio and his secretary. Lapo is unable to believe that any danger is to be dreaded from Luria. It is he who is speaking.

"If they pronounce this sentence as you bid,
Declare the treason, claim its penalty, —
And sudden out of all the blaze of life,
On the best minute of his brightest day,
From that adoring army at his back,
Thro' Florence' joyous crowds before his face,
Into the dark you beckon Luria . . .

" *Brac.*

Then —

Why, Lapo, when the fighting-people vaunt,
We of the other craft and mystery,
May we not smile demure, the danger past?

" *Sec.* Sir, no, no, no, — the danger, and your spirit
At watch and ward? Where 's danger on your part
With that thin flitting instantaneous steel
'Gainst the blind bull-front of a brute-force world?
If Luria, that 's to perish sure as fate,
Should have been really guiltless after all?

" *Brac.* Ah, you have thought that?

" *Sec.*

Here I sit, your scribe,

And in and out goes Luria, days and nights;
This Puccio comes; the Moor his other friend,
Husain; they talk — all that 's feigned easily;
He speaks (I would not listen, if I could)
Reads, orders, counsels; — but he rests sometimes, —
I see him stand and eat, sleep stretched an hour
On the lynx-skins, yonder; hold his bared black arms
Into the sun from the tent-opening; laugh
When his horse drops the forage from his teeth
And neighs to hear him hum his Moorish songs:
That man believes in Florence as the Saint
Tied to the wheel believes in God!

" *Brac.*

How strange —

You too have thought that!

" *Sec.*

Do but you think too,

And all is saved! I only have to write,
The man seemed false awhile, proves true at last;

Bury it . . . so I write to the Signory . . .
 Bury this Trial in your breasts for ever,
 Blot it from things or done or dreamed about,
 So Luria shall receive his meed to-day
 With no suspicion what reverse was near, —
 As if no meteoric finger hushed
 The doom-word just on the destroyer's lip,
 Motioned him off, and let life's sun fall straight.

“ *Brac.* (*Looks to the wall of the tent.*) Did he draw that ?

“ *Sec.* With charcoal, when the watch

Made the report at midnight ; Lady Domizia
 Spoke of the unfinished Duomo, you remember ;
 That is his fancy how a Moorish front
 Might join to, and complete, the body, — a sketch, —
 And again where the cloak hangs, yonder in the shadow.

“ *Brac.* He loves that woman.

“ *Sec.* She is sent the spy

Of Florence, — spies on you as you on him :

Florence, if only for Domizia's sake,

Were surely safe. What shall I write ?

“ *Brac.* I see —

A Moorish front, nor of such ill design !
 Lapo, there's one thing plain and positive ;
 Man seeks his own good at the whole world's cost.
 What ? If to lead our troops, stand forth our chief,
 And hold our fate, and see us at their beck,
 Yet render up the charge when peace returned,
 Have ever proved too much for Florentines,
 Even for the best and bravest of ourselves —
 If in the struggle when the soldier's sword
 Before the statist's pen should sink its point,
 And to the calm head yield the violent hand,
 Virtue on virtue still have fallen away
 Before ambition with unvarying fortune,
 Till Florence's self at last in bitterness
 Be forced to own defeat the natural end,
 And, sparing further to expose her sons
 To a vain strife and profitless disgrace,
 Have said, ‘ The Foreigner, no child of mine,
 Shall henceforth lead my troops, reach height by height
 The glory, then descend into the shame ;
 So shall rebellion be less guilt in him,
 And punishment the easier task for me ’
 — If on the best of us this brand she sets,
 Can I suppose an utter alien here,

This Luria, our inevitable foe,
 Confessed a mercenary and a Moor,
 Born free from any ties that bind the rest
 Of common faith in Heaven or hope on Earth,
 No Past with us, no Future, — such a Spirit
 Shall hold the path from which our stanchest broke,
 Stand firm where every famed precursor fell ?

Upon that broad Man's heart of his, I go !
 On what I know must be, yet while I live
 Will never be, because I live and know !
 Brute-force shall not rule Florence ! Intellect
 May rule her, bad or good as chance supplies, —
 But Intellect it shall be, pure if bad,
 And Intellect's tradition so kept up
 Till the good comes — 't was Intellect that ruled,
 Not Brute-force bringing from the battle-field
 The attributes of wisdom, foresight's graces
 We lent it there to lure its grossness on ;
 All which it took for earnest and kept safe
 To show against us in our market-place,
 Just as the plumes and tags and swordsman's-gear
 (Fetched from the camp where at their foolish best
 When all was done they frightened nobody)
 Perk in our faces in the street, forsooth,
 With our own warrant and allowance. No !
 The whole procedure 's overcharged, — its end
 In too strict keeping with the bad first step.
 To conquer Pisa was sheer inspiration !
 Well then, to perish for a single fault,
 Let that be simple justice ! — There, my Lapo !
 The Moorish front ill suits our Duomo's body —
 Blot it out — and bid Luria's sentence come ! ” — pp. 6, 7.

We must next give a glimpse of the character of Luria himself.

“ *Lur.* I wonder, do you guess why I delay
 Involuntarily the final blow
 As long as possible ? Peace follows it !
 Florence at peace, and the calm studious heads
 Come out again, the penetrating eyes ;
 As if a spell broke, all 's resumed, each art
 You boast, more vivid that it slept awhile !
 'Gainst the glad heaven, o'er the white palace-front
 The interrupted scaffold climbs anew ;

The walls are peopled by the Painter's brush ;
 The Statue to its niche ascends to dwell ;
 The Present's noise and trouble have retired
 And left the eternal Past to rule once more. —
 You speak its speech and read its records plain,
 Greece lives with you, each Roman breathes your friend,
 — But Luria, — where will then be Luria's place ?

“ *Dom.* Highest in honor, for that Past's own sake,
 Of which his actions, sealing up the sum
 By saving all that went before from wreck,
 Will range as part, with which be worshipped too.

“ *Lur.* Then I may walk and watch you in your streets
 Leading the life my rough life helps no more,
 So different, so new, so beautiful —

Nor fear that you will tire to see parade
 The club that slew the lion, now that crooks
 And shepherd-pipes come into use again ?
 For very lone and silent seems my East
 In its drear vastness — still it spreads, and still
 No Braccios, no Domizias anywhere —
 Not ever more ! — Well, well, to-day is ours !

“ *Dom.* (to *Brac.*) Should he not have been one of us ?

“ *Lur.*

Oh, no !

Not one of you, and so escape the thrill
 Of coming into you, and changing thus, —
 Feeling a soul grow on me that restricts
 The boundless unrest of the savage heart !
 The sea heaves up, hangs loaded o'er the land,
 Breaks there and buries its tumultuous strength ;
 Horror, and silence, and a pause awhile ;
 Lo, inland glides the gulf-stream, miles away,
 In rapture of assent, subdued and still,
 'Neath those strange banks, those unimagined skies !” — pp. 7, 8.

Tiburzio intercepts one of Braccio's letters to the Council at Florence, and guessing its contents from those of others which fell into his hands in the same way, brings it, with the seal unbroken, to Luria, in the hope of saving Pisa by detaching him from the cause of Florence.

“ *Lur.* Tiburzio, you that fight for Pisa now
 As I for Florence . . say my chance were yours !
 You read this letter, and you find . . no, no !
 Too mad !

“ *Tib.* I read the letter, find they purpose,
 When I have crushed their foe, to crush me : well ?

“ *Lur.* And you their captain, what is it you do?

“ *Tib.* Why as it is, all cities are alike —
I shall be as belied, whate'er the event,
As you, or more: my weak head, they will say,
Prompted this last expedient, my faint heart
Entailed on them indelible disgrace,
Both which defects ask proper punishment.
Another tenure of obedience, mine!
You are no son of Pisa's: break and read!

“ *Lur.* And act on what I read? what act were fit?
If the firm-fixed foundation of my faith
In Florence, who to me stands for Mankind,
— If that breaks up, and disemprisoning
From the abyss . . . Ah, friend, it cannot be!
You may be very sage, yet . . . all the world
Having to fail, or your sagacity,
You do not wish to find yourself alone!
What would the world be worth? Whose love be sure?
The world remains — you are deceived!

“ *Tib.* Your hand!
I lead the vanguard. — If you fall, beside,
The better — I am left to speak! For me,
This was my duty, nor would I rejoice
If I could help, it misses its effect:
And after all, you will look gallantly
Found dead here with that letter in your breast!

“ *Lur.* Tiburzio — I would see these people once
And test them ere I answer finally!
At your arrival let the trumpet sound:
If mine returns not then the wonted cry,
It means that I believe — am Pisa's!

“ *Tib.* Well! [*Exit.*

“ *Lur.* My heart will have it he speaks true! My blood
Beats close to this Tiburzio as a friend;
If he had stept into my watch-tent, night
And the wide desert full of foes around,
I should have broke the bread and given the salt
Secure, and when my hour of watch was done
Taken my turn to sleep between his knees
Safe in the unclouded brow and honest cheek.
Oh, world where all things pass and naught abides,
Oh, life the long mutation — is it so?
Is it with life as with the body's change?
— Where, e'en tho' better follow, good must pass,
Nor manhood's strength can mate with boyhood's grace,

Nor age's wisdom in its turn find strength,
But silently the first gift dies away,
And tho' the new stays — never both at once !
Life's time of savage instinct 's o'er with me,
It fades and dies away, past trusting more,
As if to punish the ingratitude
With which I turned to grow in these new lights
And learned to look with European eyes.
Yet it is better, this cold certain way,
Where Braccio's brow tells nothing, — Puccio's mouth,
Domizia's eyes reject the searcher . . yes . .
For on their calm sagacity I lean,
Their sense of right, deliberate choice of good,
That as they know my deeds they deal with me.
Yes, that is better . . that is best of all !
Such faith stays when the wild belief would go !
Yes — when the desert creature's heart, at fault
Amid the scattering tempest and its sands,
Betrays its steps into the pathless drift —
The calm instructed eye of man holds fast
By the sole bearing of the visible star,
Sure that when slow the whirling wreck subsides,
The boundaries, lost now, shall be found again, —
The palm-trees and the pyramid over all !
Yes : I trust Florence — Pisa is deceived." — pp. 10, 11.

Luria puts the letter in his bosom, and keeps it unopened. He, however, demands an explanation of Braccio, who thinks a bold confession the best move to make. Domizia, who is present, imagines her end secure. We copy a part of this scene. Braccio speaks.

" But Florence is no simple John or James
To have his toy, his fancy, his conceit,
That he's the one excepted man by fate,
And, when fate shows him he's mistaken there,
Die with all good men's praise, and yield his place
To Paul and George intent to try their chance :
Florence exists because these pass away ;
She 's a contrivance to supply a type
Of Man which men's deficiencies refuse ;
She binds so many, she grows out of them —
Stands steady o'er their numbers, tho' they change
And pass away . . there 's always what upholds,
Always enough to fashion the great show !
As, see, yon hanging city in the sun

Of shapely cloud substantially the same !
 A thousand vapors rise and sink again,
 Are interfused, and live their life and die, —
 Yet ever hangs the steady show i' the air
 Under the sun's straight influence : that is well !
 That is worth Heaven to hold, and God to bless !
 And so is Florence, — the unseen sun above,
 That draws and holds suspended all of us —
 Binds transient mists and vapors into one
 Differing from each and better than they all.
 And shall she dare to stake this permanence
 On any one man's faith ? Man's heart is weak,
 And its temptations many : let her prove
 Each servant to the very uttermost
 Before she grant him her reward, I say !
 “ *Dom.* And as for hearts she chances to mistake,
 That are not destined to receive reward,
 What should she do for these ?

“ *Brac.* What does she not ?
 Say that she gives them but herself to serve !
 Here 's Luria — what had profited his strength,
 When half an hour of sober fancying
 Had shown him step by step the uselessness
 Of strength exerted for its proper sake ?
 But the truth is she did create that strength,
 Drew to the end the corresponding means.
 The world is wide . . are we the only men ?
 Oh, for the time, the social purpose' sake,
 Use words agreed on, bandy epithets,
 Call any man, sole Great and Wise and Good !
 But shall we, therefore, standing by ourselves,
 Insult our souls and God with the same speech ?
 There swarm the ignoble thousands under Him —
 What marks us from the hundreds and the tens ?
 Florence took up, turned all one way the soul
 Of Luria with its fires, and here he stands !
 She takes me out of all the world as him,
 Fixing my coldness till like ice it stays
 The fire ! So Braccio, Luria, which is best ?
 “ *Lur.* Ah, brave me ? And is this indeed the way
 To gain your good word and sincere esteem ?
 Am I the baited tiger that must turn
 And fight his baiters to deserve their praise ?
 Obedience has no fruit then ? — Be it so !
 Do you indeed remember I stand here

The Captain of the conquering army, — mine —
 With all your tokens, praise and promise, ready
 To show for what their names were when you gave,
 Not what you style them now you take away ?

If I call in my troops to arbitrate,
 And in their first enthusiastic thrill
 Of victory, tell them how you menace me —
 Commending to their plain instinctive sense,
 My story first, your comment afterward, —
 Will they take, think you, part with you or me ?
 When I say simply, I, the man they know,
 Ending my work, ask payment and find Florence
 Has all this while provided silently
 Against the day of pay and proving words,
 By what you call my sentence that's to come —
 Will they sit waiting it complacently ?
 When I resist that sentence at their head,
 What will you do, my mild antagonist ?

“*Brac.* Then I will rise like fire, proud and triumphant
 That Florence knew you thoroughly and by me,
 And so was saved : ‘ See, Italy,’ I’ll say,
 ‘ The need of our precautions — here’s a man
 Was far advanced, just touched on the reward
 Less subtle cities had accorded him —
 But we were wiser ; at the end comes this ! ’
 And from that minute all your strength will go —
 The very stones of Florence cry against
 The all-exacting, unenduring Luria,
 Resenting her first slight probation thus
 As if he only shone and cast no shade,
 He only walked the earth with privilege
 Against suspicion, free from causing fear —
 So, for the first inquisitive mother’s word,
 Turned round and stood on his defence, forsooth !
 And you will sink into the savage back.
 Reward ? you will not be worth punishment !

“*Lur.* And Florence knew me thus ! Thus I have lived, —
 And thus you, with the clear fine intellect,
 Braccio, the cold acute instructed mind
 Out of the stir, so calm and unconfused,
 Reported me — how could you otherwise !
 Ay ? — and what dropped from *you*, just now, moreover ?
 Your information, Puccio ? — Did your skill
 And understanding sympathy approve
 Such a report of me ? Was this the end ?

Or is this the end even? Can I stop?
 You, Lady, with the woman's stand apart,
 The heart to see with, not those learned eyes,
 . . . I cannot fathom why you would destroy me, —
 It is but natural, therefore, I should ask
 Had you a further end in all you spoke,
 All I remember now for the first time?

“*Domiz*. I am a daughter of the Traversari,
 Sister of Porzio and of Berto both.
 I have foreseen all that has come to pass:
 I knew the Florence that could doubt their faith
 Must needs mistrust a stranger's — holding back
 Reward from them, must hold back his reward.
 And I believed; that shame they bore and died,
 He would not bear, but live and fight against —
 Seeing he was of other stuff than they.” — p. 13.

Luria banishes Braccio from the camp. The missive from the Signiory at Florence, calling Luria home to take his trial, is expected, but has not yet come. Braccio confers upon Puccio the command to be left vacant by the recall of Luria. Puccio, a kind of Bernal Diaz, who has been unable to refrain from criticizing the generalship of Luria all along, and whose criticisms have been made, without his knowledge, the groundwork of the charges against his commander, accepts the office at first from the mere habit of obedience natural to him as a soldier.

“*Puc*. What Luria will do? Ah, 'tis yours, fair Sir,
 Your and your subtle-witted master's part
 To tell me that; I tell you what he can.

“*Jac*. Friend, you mistake my station! I observe
 The game, watch how my betters play, no more.

“*Puc*. But mankind are not pieces . . . there's your fault!
 You cannot push them, and, the first move made,
 Lean back to study what the next should be,
 In confidence that when 't is fixed at length,
 You'll find just where you left them, blacks and whites:
 Men go on moving when your hand's away.
 You build, I notice, firm on Luria's faith
 This whole time, — firmlier than I choose to build,
 Who never doubted it — of old, that is —
 With Luria in his ordinary mind:
 But now, oppression makes the wise man mad —
 How do I know he will not turn and stand

And hold his own against you, as he may ?
But say that he withdraws to Pisa — well, —
Then, even if all happens to your wish,
Which is a chance . . .

“*Jac.* Nay — ’t was an oversight
Not waiting till the proper warrant came :
You could not take what was not ours to give.
But when at night the sentence really comes,
And Florence authorizes past dispute
Luria’s removal and your own advance,
You will perceive your duty and accept ?

“*Puc.* Accept what ? muster-rolls of soldiers’ names ?
An army upon paper ? — I want men,
Their hearts as well as hands — and where ’s a heart
That ’s not with Luria in the multitude
I come from walking thro’ by Luria’s side ?
You gave him to them, set him on to grow
A head upon their trunk, one blood feeds both,
They feel him there and live and well know why
— For they do know, if you are ignorant,
Who kept his own place and kept theirs alike, —
Managed their ease, yet never spared his own :
All was your deed : another might have served —
There ’s peradventure no such dearth of men —
But you chose Luria — so they grew to him :
And now, for nothing they can understand,
Luria ’s removed, off is to roll the head —
The body ’s mine — much I shall do with it !

“*Jac.* That ’s at the worst !

“*Puc.* No — at the best it is !
Best, do you hear ? I saw them by his side :
Only we two with Luria in the camp
Are left that know the secret ? That you think ?
Hear what I saw : from rear to van no heart
But felt the quiet patient hero there
Was wronged, nor in the moveless ranks an eye
But glancing told its fellow the whole story
Of that convicted silent knot of spies
Who passed thro’ them to Florence — they might pass —
No breast but gladlier beat when free of them !
Our troops will catch up Luria, close him round,
Lead him to Florence as their natural lord,
Partake his fortunes, live or die with him !

“*Jac.* And by mistake catch up along with him
Puccio, no doubt, compelled in self-despite

To still continue Second in Command !

“ *Puc.* No, Sir, no second nor so fortunate !
 Your tricks succeed with me too well for that !
 I am as you have made me, and shall die
 A mere trained fighting hack to serve your end ;
 With words, you laugh at while they leave your mouth,
 For my life's rules and ordinance of God !
 Duty have I to do, and faith to keep,
 And praise to earn, and blame to guard against,
 As I was trained. I shall accept your charge,
 And fight against one better than myself,
 And my own heart's conviction of his wrongs —
 That you may count on ! — just as hitherto
 Have I gone on, persuaded I was slighted,
 Degraded, all the terms we learn by rote, —
 Because the better nature, fresh-inspired,
 Mounted above me to its proper place :
 What mattered all the kindly graciousness
 And cordial brother's bearing ? This was clear —
 I was once captain, am subaltern now,
 And so must keep complaining like a fool !
 So take the curse of a lost man, I say !
 You neither play your puppets to the end,
 Nor treat the real man, — for his realness' sake
 Thrust rudely in their place, — with such regard
 As might console them for their altered rank.
 Me, the mere steady soldier, you depose
 For Luria, and here's all that he deserves !
 Of what account, then, are my services ?
 One word for all : whatever Luria does,
 — If backed by his indignant troops he turns
 In self-defence and Florence goes to ground, —
 Or for a signal, everlasting shame
 He pardons you, and simply seeks his friends
 And heads the Pisan and the Lucchese troops
 — And if I, for you ingrates past belief,
 Resolve to fight against one false to us,
 Who, inasmuch as he is true, fights there —
 Whichever way he wins, he wins for me,
 For every soldier, for the common good !
 Sir, chronicling the rest, omit not this ! ” — pp. 14, 15.

Husain and Domizia both urge Luria to revenge his wrongs,
 but from different motives.

“ *Hus.* Both armies against Florence ! Take revenge !

Wide, deep — to live upon, in feeling now, —
 And after, in remembrance, year by year —
 And, in the dear conviction, die at last !
 She lies now at thy pleasure — pleasure have !
 Their vaunted intellect that gilds our sense,
 They blend with life to show it better by,
 — How think'st thou ? — I have turned that light on them !
 They called our thirst of war a transient thing ;
 The battle element must pass away
 From life, they said, and leave a tranquil world :
 — Master, I took their light and turned it full
 On that dull turgid vein they said would burst
 And pass away ; and as I looked on Life,
 Still everywhere I tracked this, though it hid
 And shifted, lay so silent as it thought,
 Changed oft the hue yet ever was the same :
 Why 't was all fighting, all their nobler life !
 All work was fighting, every harm — defeat,
 And every joy obtained — a victory !
 Be not their dupe !

— Their dupe ? That hour is past !
 Here stand'st thou in the glory and the calm !

All is determined ! Silence for me now ! [Exit HUSAIN.

“ *Lur.* Have I heard all ?

“ *DOMIZIA* (*advancing from the background.*)

No, Luria, I am here.

Not from the motives these have urged on thee,
 Ignoble, insufficient, incomplete,
 And pregnant each with sure seeds of decay
 As failing of sustainment from thyself,
 — Neither from low revenge, nor selfishness,
 Nor savage lust of power, nor one, nor all,
 Shalt thou abolish Florence ! I proclaim
 The angel in thee and reject the spirits
 Which ineffectual crowd about his strength
 And mingle with his work and claim a share !
 — Inconsciously to the augustest end
 Thou hast arisen : second not to him
 In rank so much as time, who first ordained
 The Florence thou art to destroy, should be —
 Yet him a star, too, guided, who broke first
 The pride of lonely power, the life apart,
 And made the eminences, each to each,
 Lean o'er the level world and let it lie
 Safe from the thunder henceforth 'neath their arms —

So the few famous men of old combined
And let the multitude rise underneath
And reach them and unite — so Florence grew :
Braccio speaks well, it was well worth the price.
But when the sheltered Many grew in pride
And grudged their station to the glorious ones,
Who, greater than their kind, are truly great
Only in voluntary servitude —
Which they who, being less, would fain be more,
And so accept not, then are least of all —
Time was for thee to rise, and thou art here.
Such plague possessed this Florence — who can tell
The mighty girth and greatness at the heart
Of those so noble pillars of the grove
She pulled down in her envy ? Who as I
The light weak parasite born but to twine
Round each of them, and, measuring them, so live ?
My light love keeps the matchless circle safe,
My slender life proves what has passed away !
I lived when they departed ; lived to cling
To thee, the mighty stranger ; thou would'st rise
And burst the thralldom, and avenge, I knew.
I have done nothing — all was thy strong heart —
But as a bird's weight breaks the infant tree
Which after holds an aery in its arms,
So did I care that naught should warp thy spire
From rising to the height ; the roof is reached —
Break through and there is all the sky above !
Go on to Florence, Luria ! 'T is man's cause !
But fail thou, and thy fall is least to dread !
Thou keepest Florence in her evil way,
Encouragest her sin so much the more —
And while the bloody past is justified,
The murder of those gone before approved,
Thou all the surelier dost work against
The men to come, the Lurias yet unborn,
That, greater than thyself, are reached o'er thee
Who giv'st the vantage-ground their foes require,
As o'er my prostrate House thyself wast reached !
Man calls thee — God shall judge thee : all is said !
The mission of my House fulfilled at last !
And the mere woman, speaking for herself,
Reserves speech ; it is now no woman's time." — p. 16.

But in Luria, now that the last victory is gained for Florence, and there is no more demand made upon the executive

faculties of his mind, the reflective and ideal qualities of character begin in turn to predominate. His revenge must not be of a physical and animal type. It will be based more on impulse than reason, but it must be intellectual and heroic. He accordingly takes poison, and dies just as Braccio returns from Florence, whither Tiburzio has gone with a generous rival's admiration of his magnanimity to testify in his favor, with the news of his acquittal. Up to the fifth act, the characters have been kept entirely distinct, each within his own limited personality, and absorbed in his own aims. But now every thing centres toward Luria. His unselfish grandeur magnetizes all the rest. The true human soul in each breaks through its artificial barriers, reaching towards and doing fealty to the enthusiasm of the greater spirit which attracts and absorbs their own. There is something in this not only natural, but nobly so. We see in it an appreciation of the true elements of tragedy, not dependent on any overthrow of outward fortune, but on the simple, broad humanity common to us all. We must gratify ourselves by giving the conclusion almost entire.

“*Lur.*

My own East !

How nearer God we are ! He glows above
With scarce an intervention, presses close
And palpitatingly, His soul o'er ours !
We feel Him, nor by painful reason know !
The everlasting minute of creation
Is felt there ; *Now* it is, as it was *Then* ;
All changes at His instantaneous will,
Not by the operation of a law
Whose maker is elsewhere at other work !
His soul is still engaged upon his world —
Man's praise can forward it, Man's prayer suspend,
For is not God all-mighty ? — To recast
The world, erase old things and make them new,
What costs it Him ? So man breathes nobly there !
And inasmuch as Feeling, the East's gift,
Is quick and transient — comes, and lo, is gone —
While Northern Thought is slow and durable,
Oh, what a mission was reserved for me,
Who, born with a perception of the power
And use of the North's thought for us of the East,
Should have stayed there and turned it to account,
Giving Thought's character and permanence

To the too-transitory Feelings there —
Writing God's messages in mortal words !
Instead of which, I leave my fated field
For this where such a task is needed least,
Where all are born consummate in the art
I just perceive a chance of making mine, —
And then, deserting thus my early post,
I wonder that the men I come among
Mistake me ! There, how all had understood,
Still brought fresh stuff for me to stamp and keep,
Fresh instinct to translate them into law !
Me who . . .

“*Dom.* Who here the greater task achieve,
More needful even : who have brought fresh stuff
For us to mould, interpret, and prove right, —
New feeling fresh from God, which, could we know
O’ the instant, where had been our need of it ?
— Whose life re-teaches us what life should be,
What faith is, loyalty, and simpleness,
All their revelation, taught us so long since
That, having mere tradition of the fact,
Truth copied falteringly from copies faint,
The early traits all dropped away, — we said
On sight of faith of yours, so looks not faith
We understand, described and taught before.
But still the truth was shown ; and though at first
It suffer from our haste, yet trace by trace
Old memories reappear, the likeness grows,
Our slow Thought does its work, and all is known.
Oh, noble Luria ! what you have decreed
I see not, but no animal revenge, . . .
It cannot be the gross and vulgar way
Traced for me by convention and mistake
Has gained that calm approving eye and brow.
Spare Florence after all ! Let Luria trust
To his own soul, and I will trust to him !

"*Lur.* In time !

"*Dom.* How, Luria ?

"*Lur.* It is midnight now—

And they arrive from Florence with my fate.

"*Dom.* I hear no step . . .

"*Lur.* I feel it, as you say.

“ *Enter* HUSAIN.

"*Hus.* The man returned from Florence !

"*Lur,* As I knew.

" *Hus.* He seeks thee.

" *Lur.* And I only wait for him.
Aught else ?

" *Hus.* A movement of the Lucchese troops
Southward —

" *Lur.* . . . Toward Florence ? Have out instantly . . .
Ah, old use clings ! Puccio must care henceforth !
In — quick — 't is nearly midnight ! Bid him come !

" *Enter* TIBURZIO, BRACCIO, and PUCCIO.

" *Lur.* Tiburzio, — not at Pisa ?

" *Tib.* I return
From Florence : I serve Pisa, and must think
By such procedure I have served her best.
A people is but the attempt of many
To rise to the completer life of one —
And those who live as models for the mass
Are singly of more value than they all.
Such man are you, and such a time is this
That your sole fate concerns a nation more
Than its immediate welfare ; and to prove
Your rectitude, and duly crown the same,
Of consequence beyond the day's event.
Keep but the model safe, new men will rise
To study it, and many another day.
I might go try my fortune as you bade,
And joining Lucca, helped by your disgrace,
Repair our harm — so were to-day's work done :
But I look farther. I have testified
(Declaring my submission to your arms)
Your full success to Florence, making clear
Your probity as none else could : I spoke —
And it shone clearly !

" *Lur.* Ah — till Braccio spoke !

" *Brac.* Till Braccio told in just a word the whole —
His old great error and return to knowledge —
Which told . . . Nay, Luria, I should droop the head
Whom all shame rests with, yet I dare look up,
Sure of your pardon now I sue for it,
Knowing you wholly — so let midnight end !
Sunrise will come next ! Still you answer not ?
The shadow of the night is past away :
The circling faces here 'mid which it rose
Are all that felt it, — they close round you now
To witness its completest vanishing.

Speak, Luria ! Here begins your true career —
Look up to it ! — All now is possible —
The glory and the grandeur of each dream —
And every prophecy shall be fulfilled
Save one . . (nay, now your word must come at last)
— That you would punish Florence !

“ *Husain (pointing to LURIA's dead body)*. That is done ! ”

— pp. 19, 20.

We cannot leave Mr. Browning without giving one extract of another kind. His humor is as genuine as that of Carlyle, and if his laugh have not the “ earthquake ” character with which Emerson has so happily labelled the shaggy merriment of that Jean Paul Burns, yet it is always sincere and hearty, and there is a tone of meaning in it which always sets us thinking. Had we room, we should be glad to give our readers a full analysis of his *Soul's Tragedy*, which abounds in the truest humor, flitting from point to point with all the electric sparkle and condensed energy of wit. Wit employs itself about externals and conventionalities. Its merit lies quite as much in nicety of expression as in the idea expressed, or even more. For it is something which may be composed, and is therefore necessarily choice of form. Humor goes deeper, bases itself upon the eternal, and not the ephemeral, relations of things, and is something interfused through the whole nature of the man, and which, forcing him to feel keenly what is hollow in the outward forms of society, often makes him careless of all form. In literature, therefore, we see it overleaping or breaking down all barriers. Wit makes other men laugh, and that only once. It may be repeated indefinitely to new audiences, and produce the same result. Humor makes the humorist himself laugh. He is a part of his humor, and it can never be repeated without loss. If we take the common metaphor, that humor is broader than wit, we shall express well enough its greater carelessness of form and precise limit. It especially behooves a poet, then, to be on his guard against the impulses of his humor. Poetry and humor are subject to different laws of art, and it is dangerous to let one encroach upon the province of the other. It may be questioned, whether verse, which is by nature subject to strict law, be the proper vehicle for humor at all. The contrast, to be sure, between the preciseness of the metrical rule and the frolicsome license of the thought, has

something humorous in itself. The greater *swing* which is allowed to the humorous poet in rhythm and rhyme, as well as in thought, may be of service to him, and save him from formality in his serious verses. Undoubtedly the success of Hood's *Bridge of Sighs* was due in some degree to the quaintness and point of the measure and the rhyme, the secret of which he had learned in his practice as a humorous versifier. But there is danger that the poet, in allowing full scope to this erratic part of his nature, may be brought in time to value form generally at less than its true worth as an element of art. We have sometimes felt a jar in reading Mr. Browning's lyrical poems, when, just as he has filled us full of quiet delight by some touch of pathos or marble gleam of classical beauty, this exuberant geniality suggests some cognate image of the ludicrous, and turns round to laugh in our faces. This necessity of deferring to form in some shape or other is a natural, and not an ingrafted, quality of human nature. It often, laughably enough, leads men, who have been totally regardless of all higher laws, to cling most pertinaciously and conscientiously to certain purely ceremonial observances. If the English courts should ever dispense with so much of their dignity and decorum as consists in horsehair, we have no doubt that the first rogue who shall be sentenced by a wigless judge will be obstinately convinced of a certain unconstitutionality in the proceeding, and feel himself an injured man, defrauded of the full dignity of the justice enjoyed by his ancestors.

We copy one specimen of Mr. Browning's more formal and, so to speak, scholastic humor.

“SIBRANDUS SCHAFNABURGENSIS.

“Plague take all pedants, say I !
He who wrote what I hold in my hand
Centuries back was so good as to die,
Leaving this rubbish to bother the land ;
This, that was a book in its time,
Printed on paper and bound in leather,
Last month in the white of a matin-prime
Just when the birds sang all together,

“Into the garden I brought it to read ;
And under the arbute and laurustine
Read it, so help me grace in my need,
From title-page to closing line.

Chapter on chapter did I count,
As a curious traveller counts Stonehenge ;
Added up the mortal amount ;
And then proceeded to my revenge.

“ Yonder 's a plum-tree, with a crevice
An owl would build in, were he but sage ;
For a lap of moss, like a fine pont-levis
In a castle of the middle age,
Joins to a lip of gum, pure amber ;
When he 'd be private, there might he spend
Hours alone in his lady's chamber :
Into this crevice I dropped our friend.

“ Splash, went he, as under he ducked,
— I knew at the bottom rain-drippings stagnate ;
Next a handful of blossoms I plucked
To bury him with, my bookshelf's magnate ;
Then I went in-doors, brought out a loaf,
Half a cheese, and a bottle of Chablis ;
Lay on the grass and forgot the oaf
Over a jolly chapter of Rabelais.

“ Now, this morning, betwixt the moss
And gum that locked our friend in limbo,
A spider had spun his web across,
And sat in the midst with arms akimbo ;
So I took pity, for learning's sake,
And, *de profundis, accentibus lätis*,
Cantate, quoth I, as I got a rake,
And up I fished his delectable treatise.

“ Here you have it, dry in the sun,
With all the binding all of a blister,
And great blue spots where the ink has run,
And reddish streaks that wink and glisten
O'er the page so beautifully yellow —
Oh, well have the droppings played their tricks !
Did he guess how toadstools grow, this fellow ?
Here 's one stuck in his chapter six !

“ How did he like it when the live creatures
Tickled and toused and browsed him all over,
And worm, slug, eft, with serious features,
Came in, each one, for his right of trover ;

When the water-beetle with great blind deaf face
 Made of her eggs the stately deposit,
 And the newt borrowed so much of the preface
 As tiled in the top of his black wife's closet.

“ All that life, and fun, and romping,
 All that frisking, and twisting, and coupling,
 While slowly our poor friend's leaves were swamping,
 And clasps were cracking, and covers suppling !
 As if you had carried sour John Knox
 To the play-house at Paris, Vienna, or Munich,
 Fastened him into a front-row box,
 And danced off the Ballet with trousers and tunic.

“ Come, old martyr ! What, torment enough is it ?
 Back to my room shall you take your sweet self !
 Good bye, mother-beetle ; husband-eft, *sufficit* !
 See the snug niche I have made on my shelf :
 A's book shall prop you up, B's shall cover you,
 Here 's C to be grave with, or D to be gay,
 And with E on each side, and F right over you,
 Dry-rot at ease till the Judgment-day ! ”
 — *Bells and Pomegranates*, No. VII. pp. 10, 11.

We are confident that our readers will sympathize with us in the joy we feel, that one, at least, of those old bores in quarto, whose oppressions we have all suffered in our several degrees, has met with an adequate retribution.

We shall present one more specimen of our author's manner, because the old legend on which the poem is founded is so beautiful in itself, and because the poet has drawn from it so simple and exquisite a moral.

“ THE BOY AND THE ANGEL.

“ Morning, evening, noon, and night,
 ‘ Praise God,’ sang Theocrite.
 Then to his poor trade he turned
 By which the daily meal was earned.
 Hard he labored, long and well ;
 O'er the work his boy's curls fell ;
 But ever, at each period,
 He stopped and sang, ‘ Praise God,’
 Then back again his curls he threw,
 And cheerful turned to work anew.
 Said Blaise, the listening monk, ‘ Well done ;
 I doubt not thou art heard, my son :

As well as if thy voice to-day
Were praising God the Pope's great way.
This Easter Day, the Pope at Rome
Praises God from Peter's dome.'
Said Theocrite, 'Would God that I
Might praise Him, that great way, and die !'
Night passed, day shone,
And Theocrite was gone.
With God a day endures alway,
A thousand years are but a day.
God said in Heaven, 'Nor day nor night
Now brings the voice of my delight.'
Then Gabriel, like a rainbow's birth,
Spread his wings and sank to earth ;
Entered in flesh the empty cell,
Lived there, and played the craftsman well :
And morning, evening, noon, and night,
Praised God in place of Theocrite.
And from a boy, to youth he grew :
The Man put off the Stripling's hue :
The man matured and fell away
Into the season of decay :
And ever o'er the trade he bent
And ever lived on earth content.
God said, 'A praise is in mine ear ;
There is no doubt in it, no fear :
So sing old worlds, and so
New worlds that from my footstool go.
Clearer loves sound other ways :
I miss my little human praise.'
Then forth sprang Gabriel's wings, off fell
The flesh disguise, remained the cell.
'T was Easter Day : he flew to Rome,
And paused above Saint Peter's dome.
In the tiring-room close by
The great outer gallery,
With his holy vestments dight,
Stood the new Pope, Theocrite :
And all his past career
Came back upon him clear.
Since when, a boy, he plied his trade
Till on his life the sickness weighed :
And in his cell when death drew near
An angel in a dream brought cheer :

And rising from the sickness drear
He grew a priest, and now stood here.
To the East with praise he turned
And on his sight the angel burned.
'I bore thee from thy craftsman's cell,
And set thee here ; I did not well.
Vainly I left my angel's sphere,
Vain was thy dream of many a year.
Thy voice's praise seemed weak ; it dropped —
Creation's chorus stopped !
Go back and praise again
The early way — while I remain.
With that weak voice of our disdain,
Take up Creation's pausing strain.
Back to the cell and poor employ :
Become the craftsman and the boy !'
Theocrite grew old at home ;
A new Pope dwelt in Peter's Dome.
One vanished as the other died :
They sought God side by side."

— *Bells and Pomegranates*, No. vii. pp. 19, 20.

There are two faults of which we are chiefly conscious in these lyrics. The first is a tendency to parenthesize one thought or metaphor within another, and seems to arise from fertility of mind and exuberance of illustration, united with the power of too facile execution. The other is involved in that humorous element of his character which we have noticed, and which gives him so keen an enjoyment of his own thoughts as disqualifies him for distinguishing those of them which will strike all other minds with equal distinctness and force, and those which will be appreciated only by persons constituted like himself. From both these defects his dramas are almost wholly free.

And now, if we could be sure that our readers would read Mr. Browning's poems with the respect and attentive study they deserve, what should hinder us from saying that we think him a great poet ? However, as the world feels uncomfortably somewhere, it can hardly tell how or why, at hearing people called great, before it can claim a share in their greatness by erecting to them a monument with a monk-Latin inscription on it which nine tenths of their countrymen cannot construe, and as Mr. Browning must be as yet comparatively a young man, we will content ourselves with saying that he has in him

the elements of greatness. To us he appears to have a wider range and greater freedom of movement than any other of the younger English poets. In his dramas we find always a leading design and a conscientious subordination of all the parts to it. In each one of them also, below the more apparent and exterior sources of interest, we find an illustration of some general idea which bears only a philosophical relation to the particular characters, thoughts, and incidents, and without which the drama is still complete in itself, but which yet binds together and sustains the whole, and conduces to that unity for which we esteem these works so highly. In another respect Mr. Browning's dramatic power is rare. The characters of his women are finely discriminated. No two are alike, and yet the characteristic features of each are touched with the most delicate precision. By far the greater number of authors who have attempted female characters have given us mere automata. They think it enough, if they make them subordinate to a generalized idea of human nature. Mr. Browning never forgets that women *are* women, and not simply human beings, for there they occupy common ground with men.

Many English dramas have been written within a few years, the authors of which have established their claim to the title of poet. We cannot but allow that we find in them fine thoughts finely expressed, passages of dignified and sustained eloquence, and as adequate a conception of character as the reading of history and the study of models will furnish. But it is only in Mr. Browning that we find enough of freshness, vigor, grasp, and of that clear insight and conception which enable the artist to construct characters from within, and so to make them real things, and not images, as to warrant our granting the honor due to the Dramatist.